

16 Recognizing Sentence Patterns

Word order is the most important principle of English grammar, so sentences follow consistent patterns. This chapter will familiarize you with those patterns so that you'll be able to

- recognize the patterns used most often
- recognize other important but less commonly used patterns
- recognize patterns in which the subject acts, and patterns in which the subject is acted upon
- gain practice in writing correct sentences

The terms used in this chapter are all introduced and defined in Chapter 15.

What Is a Sentence?

A sentence makes a complete statement or asks a question.

Statements

All statements consist of two parts:

- the **subject**, the word or words the sentence makes a statement about
- the **predicate**, the word (or, in most cases, words) that make the statement about the subject

Questions

Questions reverse the order of the subject and the verb. Often the verb is split, with the helping verb preceding the subject and the remainder of the verb following the subject. Many questions begin with question words such as *who*, *where*, *what*, or *why*.

The Four Basic Sentence Patterns

Although you'll be looking at nine sentence patterns in this chapter, let's begin with the four that are used most frequently.

Pattern 1: Subject + Verb

In this first pattern, the subject is followed by an **intransitive verb**, which cannot take an object. Many intransitive verbs, however, are followed by a prepositional phrase or modified by adverbs:

| Subject | Verb | Prepositional phrase | Adverb |
|--|------------|----------------------|--------|
| Most people | work. | | |
| Rafael | is walking | to the store. | |
| We | fly | | often. |
| Question | | | |
| Do your parents work? | | | |
| Question beginning with question word | | | |
| Why is Rafael walking to the store? | | | |

EXERCISE 1

Writing Sentences in Pattern 1

Write sentences using the verbs in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

1. (went) *I went to the store.* _____
2. (fell) _____
3. (am talking) _____
4. (traveled) _____
5. (is lying) _____
6. (spoke) _____

Pattern 2: Subject + Verb + Direct Object

The second pattern includes a **transitive verb**, which almost always takes a direct object. Descriptive words or phrases may follow the verb and its object:

| Subject | Verb | Direct object | Descriptive phrases |
|--|------|------------------|---------------------|
| We | need | some milk | from the store. |
| We | saw | the Grand Canyon | last week. |
| Question | | | |
| Do we need milk? | | | |
| Question beginning with question word | | | |
| When did you see the Grand Canyon? | | | |

EXERCISE 2**Writing Sentences in Pattern 2**

Write sentences using the verbs in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

1. (heard) *I heard a loud noise.* _____
2. (gave) _____
3. (took) _____
4. (am making) _____
5. (will do) _____
6. (want) _____

Pattern 3: Subject + Linking Verb + Subject Complement

This pattern includes a **linking verb** (*be, become, appear, seem, feel, taste, and smell*), which does not express an action. Instead it *links* the subject to a **subject complement**—an adjective that describes the subject or a noun that renames it:

| Subject | Linking verb | Subject complement |
|--|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Guillermo | looks | sad. (adjective) |
| Movies | are | great entertainment. (noun) |
| Question | | |
| Does Guillermo look lonely? | | |
| Question beginning with question word | | |
| Why does Guillermo look sad? | | |

EXERCISE 3**Writing Sentences in Pattern 3**

Write sentences using the verbs in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

1. (sounds) *The music sounds great.* _____
2. (is) _____
3. (became) _____
4. (acts) _____
5. (was) _____
6. (seemed) _____

Pattern 4: Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object

In this pattern, the transitive verb is followed by both an indirect object and a direct object. The **direct object** receives the action of the verb. The **indirect object** receives the direct object. It's the person or thing to whom or for whom the action was done:

| Subject | Verb | Indirect object | Direct object | Indirect object |
|--|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| You | should give | the waiter | a tip. | |
| They | bought | her | a present. | |
| Max | explained | | the problem | to me. |
| Question | | | | |
| Should we give the waiter a tip? | | | | |
| Question beginning with question word | | | | |
| What did they bring her? | | | | |
| Who explained the problem to you? | | | | |

EXERCISE 4

Writing Sentences in Pattern 4

Write sentences using the verbs in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

1. (made) *I made my friends dinner.* _____
2. (gave) _____
3. (will send) _____
4. (are taking) _____
5. (mailed) _____
6. (served) _____

Other Sentence Patterns

The five remaining sentence patterns are used less often than the first four. Some, but not all, place the verb before the subject.

Pattern 5: *There/It* + Verb + Subject

In this pattern, the word *there* or *it* begins the sentence, and the subject comes after the verb. *There* and *it* are not the subjects but are simply ways of starting the sentence:

| Starter | Verb (usually <i>be</i>) | Subject | Descriptive phrase |
|--|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| There | are | some pencils | in my briefcase. |
| It | isn't (easy) | to do the job. | |
| Question | | | |
| Is it hard to learn? | | | |
| Question beginning with question word | | | |
| Why aren't there any pens in your briefcase? | | | |

In the first example, the real subject is *some pencils*. In the second example, the subject is *to do the job* (an infinitive and a phrase).

EXERCISE 5

Writing Sentences in Pattern 5

Complete the sentences using the words in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

- (to sing) It *is an easy song to sing*.
- (a lot to do) There _____
- (ten o'clock) It _____
- (more than one hundred irregular verbs) _____
- (sad to hear) _____
- (difficult) _____

Pattern 6: Verb + Remainder of Predicate

This pattern is called a **command** or an **imperative sentence**. Its implied subject (*you*) is omitted, and the verb is the **partial infinitive** (without *to*). The sentence gives advice, directions, or orders. The pattern cannot be used for questions:

| Subject | Verb | Remainder of predicate |
|---------|------------|---|
| (You) | Do | your work. (direct object) |
| | Be | careful. (adjective) |
| | Don't go. | (intransitive verb) |
| | Don't send | him the letter. (indirect object and direct object) |

EXERCISE 6**Writing Sentences in Pattern 6**

Write sentences using the verbs in parentheses. At least one sentence should use a negative.

1. (touch) *Don't touch that hot dish.* _____
2. (sit) _____
3. (go) _____
4. (take) _____
5. (run) _____
6. (swim) _____

Pattern 7: Subject + Verb + Direct Object + Infinitive

In this pattern, which uses verbs such as *tell*, *ask*, *make*, *have*, or *get*, the subject causes the object to act in some way. A partial or full infinitive following the object expresses that action:

| Subject | Verb | Direct object | Partial or full infinitive |
|--|------|---------------|----------------------------|
| He | made | her | do it. |
| They | had | him | do it. |
| I | got | him | to do it. |
| Question | | | |
| Did he make her do it? | | | |
| Question beginning with question word | | | |
| Why did they have him do it? | | | |

EXERCISE 7**Writing Sentences in Pattern 7**

Write sentences using the verbs in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

1. (told) *I told him to finish his homework.* _____
2. (asked) _____
3. (made) _____
4. (will get) _____
5. (had) _____
6. (ordered) _____

Pattern 8: Subject + Verb + Direct Object + Partial Infinitive or Gerund

In this pattern, the subject observes the object as it acts. Some examples of verbs following the subject include *see*, *hear*, *notice*, *feel*, *look at*, *listen to*, and *observe*. The action of the object is expressed by a partial infinitive or a gerund:

| Subject | Verb | Direct object | Partial infinitive or gerund |
|--|-------|---------------|------------------------------|
| He | saw | the turtle | moving. |
| They | heard | the rain | fall. |
| Question | | | |
| Did you see the turtle moving? | | | |
| Question beginning with a question word | | | |
| When did they hear the rain fall? | | | |

EXERCISE 8

Writing Sentences in Pattern 8

Write sentences using the verbs in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

1. (felt) *I felt the ground shake during the earthquake.*
2. (see) _____
3. (noticed) _____
4. (heard) _____
5. (looked at) _____
6. (is listening to) _____

Pattern 9: Subject + Transitive Verb + Direct Object + Object Complement

In this pattern, the direct object is followed by an **object complement**—an adjective that describes the object or a noun that renames it. Typical verbs for this pattern are *make*, *name*, *find*, *appoint*, and *elect*:

| Subject | Transitive verb | Direct object | Object complement |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Mohammed | left | his door | unlocked. (adjective) |
| Margarita | named | her puppy | Frisky. (noun) |

Question

Did Mohammed leave his door unlocked?

Question beginning with question word

What did Margarita name her puppy?

EXERCISE 9**Writing Sentences in Pattern 9**

Write sentences using the words in parentheses. One of your sentences should be a question.

1. (made) *The class made me a better writer.* _____
2. (will name) _____
3. (elected) _____
4. (appointed) _____
5. (found/interesting) _____
6. (leave) _____

These nine basic patterns form simple sentences—those with only one clause. You will see how to form compound sentences (with two independent clauses) and complex sentences (with a dependent clause and an independent clause) in Chapters 24–27.

EXERCISE 10**Writing Questions**

Respond to each of the statements with a question. Begin your response with a question word.

1. Wilfredo is working. *Where is he working?* OR *When will he finish?* _____

2. Maria is leaving tomorrow. _____

3. Amir wants some help soon. _____

4. Silvia gave me something to eat. _____

5. Someone told me a lie. _____

6. He saw something move in the alley. _____
